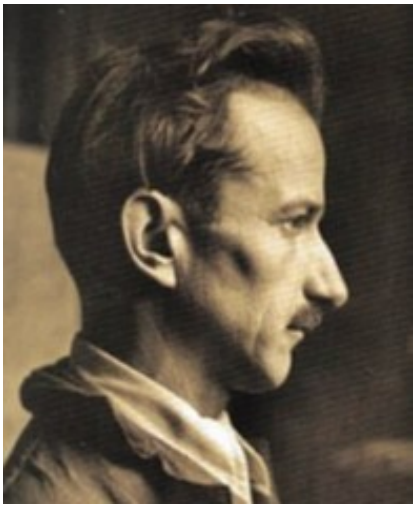
# Pietro Valentino Giampaoli



Udine, a city in northeastern Italy, is believed to have existed since 983 AD. At one point in the past, it was the historical capital of Friuli. Not surprisingly, a dialect called Friulian is still spoken by approximately 800,000 people living in Udine and the surrounding areas. If you visit this city, the locals will strongly recommend trying a savory pie made with Montasio cheese called frico.

About 12 miles northwest of Udine, there is a comune named Buja. On February 13th, 1898, a significant event occurred with the birth of a second son to Luigi Giampaoli and Teresa Pischiutta. Nobody could have guessed, 39 years into the future, that Pietro Valentino Giampaoli would become the chief engraver at the Italian State Mint.

Since his father was a carpenter by trade, Pietro learned how to saw, plane and carve wood. Once he had completed elementary school, he emigrated to Austria. At the age of 16, he returned home to dig trenches at the front as Italy was now at war with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the German Second Reich of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Once Giampaoli reached the minimum enlistment age, he joined the Italian Alpine troops. Taken prisoner in 1917, he was placed in a prisoner-of-war camp in Hungary. Life in the camp was one of complete squalor, with the constant threat of dying from hunger and the cold. Under these unpleasant circumstances, the future direction of his life would be revealed to him. One of his fellow inmates was a Russian prisoner who agreed to teach him everything he knew about engraving medals.

After successfully escaping one day, he found sanctuary with a farmer who needed help with working the land. Locals in the area learned he was adept at engraving items, so they brought him watches, bracelets, boxes and cigarette cases to work on.

He returned to Italy after the war and, in 1920, made his way to Milan to enroll as a student at the Brera Academy. He excelled in his course work in the fine arts and in 1924 won first prize in a chiseling competition. While continuing his studies, he suffered greatly from a lack of income. His clothes were badly worn and his shoes eventually fell apart. With no money for new shoes, he created an artificial sole for his feet by walking on liquid asphalt and then on sand.

After completing his studies, Giampaoli moved to Rome and rented a room on the sixth floor of an old building. He put the skills he had learned to good use and, before long, had saved enough money to relocate to a larger building on the Via Banco Santo Spirito. His family from Buja soon joined him to help with his work.

He built a primitive, yet very capable, medal casting machine, enabling him to engrave, shape and cast his medals. He also instructed others in the art of engraving medals. His brothers, Vittorio Giampaoli and Celestino Giampaoli, were his pupils and both achieved great success.

Vittorio, who was passionate about solving technical problems, is known for being the first to use flexible tools and dental burs for engraving. He died at the age of 28 in 1947 from an illness he had contracted in India while incarcerated in a concentration camp during the Second World War. Celestino, who reached the age of 95, created models for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, Uganda, Jordan, Indonesia, the Emirate of Sharjah and the Emirate of Fujaira.

Pietro Giampaoli produced medals of very high quality and a great many noteworthy people took notice of this. He engraved medals for Pope Pius XI, cardinals, bishops, financial magnates, army generals, heads of state, politicians and many more.

In March 1937, he received a phone call from the Italian State Mint, offering him the job of Chief Engraver. At the Mint, he was responsible for designing the post-war circulating coins for Italy. Some of these engraved coins were produced in collaboration with Giuseppe Romagnoli (1872 to 1966), a famous Italian medalist and sculptor. Giampaoli also designed coins and medals for the Vatican, San Marino, Malta and Turkey and performed consulting work for Germany, France, Israel and Tunisia. He retired from the mint on his 65th birthday in 1963.

His most well-known creation is the Italian 500 Lire coin, containing 0.2953 oz of silver. From 1958 to 1967, the mint produced 97,840,000 for circulation. He engraved the obverse side using his wife, Letizia Savonitto, as a model for the woman wearing Renaissance clothing. Around the edge of the coin are the coats of arms of the regions or cities of Italy, with Genoa on the left and ending with Cagliari on the right. The bust covers an additional two coats of arms. The reverse side was engraved by Guido Veroi (1926 to 2013) and features Christopher Columbus's three caravels, the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. This 500 Lire coin eventually became commonly known as the Caravelle.

The Turkish 1 Lira coin, first issued in 1957, features the effigy of Kemal Atatürk, designed by Pietro Giampaoli. The weight of this coin was reduced in 1967, but the design continued in use until 1980. Unlike many of his other circulating coins, his name is not engraved on the 1 Lira. Another example of his work is the Turkish 25 Kurus coin, which circulated from 1959 to 1978. This coin features a lady wearing traditional Turkish garments while carrying a gun shell on her shoulder.

Many of the Vatican City coins from 1950 to 1965 were engraved by Pietro Giampaoli. Pictured above is a 100 Lire coin from 1962. Giampaoli's name is below the portrait of Pope John XXIII and above the "O" in "ANNO." Even with a headband magnifier, it is a challenge to view these letters. The reverse side features the Second Ecumenical Council. Besides circulating coins, he also produced many medals for the Vatican to celebrate various occasions, such as the election of a new Pope.

Slightly smaller than a Canadian 25 cent coin and weighing 4.66 grams, the above sterling silver medal features a lion looking at the sun. This lion medal is just one of 12 zodiac medals engraved by Pietro Giampaoli as part of a collaborative commercial venture with UnoAErre, an Italian goldsmith, jewelry and watchmaking company based in Arezzo, Italy. This company was founded in 1926 by Leopoldo Gori and Carlo Zucchi. Leo is the fifth sign of the zodiac, governing the period from July 23 to August 22. Each zodiac sign is associated with a celestial body that influences its unique characteristics. For Leo, it is the sun.

According to Greek legend, Leo was a fierce lion who terrorized the ancient city of Nemea. Hera, the wife

of Zeus, hated Hercules, the offspring of Zeus and Alcmene, a mortal woman, so she temporarily inflicted him with madness, causing him to murder his wife and children. To atone for his actions, one of his twelve labours was to kill the Nemean lion, which he did by strangling the beast with his bare hands. Zeus then placed Leo in the sky to honour Hercules for completing this task.

The opposite side of this medal features two Greek gods. Helios is the sun god who drives the four-horse chariot, and Nike, the personification of victory, is the winged female who holds a wreath, the symbol of triumph.

There is some confusion regarding the date of manufacture of these medals, as internet postings give dates ranging from the 1950s to the 1980s. I composed a text message, translated it into Italian, and sent several emails to destinations in Italy, hoping for some clarification. With no replies received, my best guess is the 1970s, as that period has been frequently mentioned.

The zodiac medals sold on the internet have, for the most part, been placed in bezels and sold as jewelry. The silver and 18K gold jewelry sell for well above their melt value. Without bezels, the sterling silver zodiac medals sell at their bullion price.

Pietro Giampaoli, who died in Rome in 1998 at the age of 100, is rated as Italy's greatest medal engraver of the 20th century. If you wish to collect coins and medals produced by a specific engraver, a search of the Internet will yield results. Numista can also be of assistance as it can generate a coin catalogue specific to an engraver's name.

- Ted Skrecky

## A Brief History of Greenland

Greenland is the world's largest island, located in the North Atlantic Ocean, and is 16 miles from Canada's Ellesmere Island. Most of this landmass lies within the Arctic Circle, with 80% currently covered by an ice sheet.

The first known human habitation occurred with the arrival of native people from North America around 2,500 BC. Due to the inhospitable climate, this island has been occupied by a succession of migratory groups, including the Dorset and Thule.

The Norse discovered Greenland in the late 9th century, and the first settlement was established in 985 AD. Norse occupation continued for the next 450 to 500 years. In 1540, an Icelandic seafarer visited the island and found a dead Norse Greenlander lying face down on the ground. This person was wearing clothing made of frieze cloth and sealskin. Near his body, a bent and badly worn sheathed knife was found.

In 1721, Hans Egede, a clergyman, received permission from the United Kingdoms of Denmark and Norway to found a Greenland settlement at Godthåb (now Nuuk). It was quickly discovered that the Norse were all long dead, but the local Inuit were doing fine.

Nazi Germany occupied Denmark on April 9, 1940. To prevent a Nazi invasion of Greenland, the United States of America occupied the island on April 8th, 1941. The US built military installations and airfields during the war. Several of these bases remained operational into the Cold War period. Pituffik Space Base, formerly known as Thule Air Base, is the only one still occupied by the US. It is used for missile defense and space surveillance.

Numerous abandoned US military bases exist in Greenland, such as Bluie East Two Base, which operated from 1942 to 1947. Littering the landscape are an estimated 33,786 rusting barrels, some still filled with aviation and automotive gas and heating oil. Other items such as trucks, bulldozers and collapsed airplane hangars, along with quantities of buried ammunition, are still there.

According to a CBC article dated September 11, 2016, Robert Baxter, who was stationed at this base in 1946, stated there were 800 cases of dynamite in a

wooden shed. The US Army sent a demolitions expert who took one look at the dynamite and then left. Dynamite can be safely handled for up to four years. Old dynamite will “weep” or “sweat” nitroglycerin and even minor disturbances can cause a detonation.

In 2018, Denmark signed a $29 million agreement with Greenland for remediation work at these defunct US Army bases. The removal of barrels at the Bluie East Two Base was initiated in September 2019. By August 2021, the area covered by these barrels had been reduced from 1.6 hectares to 0.7 hectares.

In 1953, Greenland officially became part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Home rule was granted in 1979, with Denmark retaining control over foreign affairs and defense. Today, Greenland has a population of 55,865, with 89% being Inuit.

Greenland’s currency is the Danish Krone, first introduced on January 1, 1875. In 1926, the Royal Greenlandic Trade, a Danish government trade monopoly, produced 25 Ore, 50 Ore and 1 Krone coins for local circulation. Hans Christian Nielsen and Knud Gunnar Jensen performed the engraving work.

The mintage for the 50 Ore coin, pictured in this article, is 196,000. The largest mintage is for the 25 Ore at 310,000. To avoid confusion with the 1 Krone coin, the 25 Ore coins were temporarily withdrawn from circulation in 1940. 60,000 were sent to the United States, where a hole was made at the centre of each coin to match the design of the Danish 25 Ore.

In 1944, the US Mint in Philadelphia produced 100,000 5 Kroner coins. These coins were used by American armed forces personnel stationed in Greenland.

All coins issued for Greenland were withdrawn from circulation in 1967. These coins can be purchased from internet coin dealers such as cgb.fr Numismatics Paris or from eBay. Prices range from $25 to several hundred dollars.

- Ted Skrecky

## The Edmonton Numismatic Society

This coin and paper money collector club was founded in 1953 and incorporated as a society in 1977 under the Alberta Societies Act. In addition to the monthly meetings, the club hosts and organizes two yearly coin shows. The shows are large events with 60 tables and over 40 vendors at the April 2025 show.

Their website, averaging at least 3,000 monthly visits, is well organized and easy to use. Some numismatic-related articles are available for reading, along with resource material such as “Guide to Coin Collecting” and “Buying, Selling and Appraising.” There is a scrolling list of coin dealer business cards, and clicking on a card will direct you to the dealer’s website.

The club produces seven issues per calendar year of a publication called “The Planchet,” which has over 250 subscribers. Issues older than twelve months can be downloaded for free from their website.

The Planchet, with a page count of 30 to 50 pages, has production values similar to glossy magazines sold at newsstands. The articles, written by club members, are well-researched and informative and feature many eye-catching pictures of coins. Each issue has advertisements from Canadian coin dealers such as J&M Coin & Jewellery Ltd (Vancouver, BC).

The yearly membership dues for a single adult are $20. Even if you do not live within driving distance of Edmonton, receiving seven issues of their publication per year is a good deal.

- Ted Skrecky

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